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GAUTAMA THE BUDDHA

BY
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GAUTAMA THE BUDDHA

THIS lectureship has celebrated in the past many eminent names in the history of art and science, philosophy and literature, but they all belonged to the Western world. In Gautama the Buddha we have a master mind from the East, second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of a religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other. He belongs to the history of the world's thought, to the general inheritance of all cultivated men; for, judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness and spiritual insight, he is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in history.

I

Though his historical character has been called in question,¹ there are few competent scholars, if any, at the present day who doubt that he was an historical person whose date can be fixed, whose life can be sketched at least in outline, and whose teachings on some of the essential problems of the philosophy of religion can be learnt with reasonable certainty. I cannot here enter into a detailed justification for holding that certain parts of the early Canonical literature contain the recollections of those who had seen and heard the Master.² It

¹ See Émile Senart: *Essai sur la légende du Buddha* (1875)

² The tradition is that the *Dharma* and the *Vinaya* were rehearsed in a Council held immediately after the death of the

was a world in which writing was not much in use ; so memories were more accurate and tenacious than is usual now. This is evident from the fact that a document of a much earlier date, the *Rg Veda*, has come down to us, preserved in men's memories, with fewer variant readings than many texts of later ages.¹ Though the Buddhist documents have

Buddha and that a second Council was held a hundred years later at Vaiśālī, when the *Vinaya* was again recited and ten errors of discipline were condemned. According to the Ceylonese school, the third Buddhist Council was held in the time of Aśoka about 247 B.C. From the Bhābrū edict of Aśoka, where seven passages which are identified with parts of the *Sutta Pitaka* are cited for study by his co-religionists, it may be inferred that Buddhist texts of the type preserved in that book were in existence in Aśoka's time. In the inscriptions at Sāñchi, the terms *dhammakathika*, 'preacher of the Law', *petaki*, one who knows a Pitaka, *sutātikinī*, one who knows a Suttanta, *pacanekāyika*, one who knows the five Nikāyas, occur, and they indicate that Pitakas, Dialogues, and the five Nikāyas were well known at the time. These inscriptions are admitted to be of the second century B.C. We may take it as fairly certain that the Canonical tradition was well established about the period of Aśoka. This fact is confirmed by the evidence of the Chinese translations and the discovery of Sanskrit texts answering to parts of the five Nikāyas. Within the Canon itself there are strata of varying dates and signs of much addition and alteration, though the whole of it is said to be the word of the Buddha, *buddhavacana* or *pravacana*, the best of words. It is clear that there has been a floating tradition from the time of the Buddha himself.

¹ Professor Macdonell writes: 'It appears that the kernel of Vedic tradition, as represented by the *Rg Veda*, has come down to us, with a high degree of fixity and remarkable care for verbal integrity, from a period which can hardly be less remote than 1000 B.C.' (*A History of Sanskrit Literature* (1900), pp. 46-7)

undergone a good deal of editing in later times, the memorable sayings and deeds of the Founder can be learnt with moderate accuracy. The ornate supernatural elements and unhistorical narratives such as those about the marvels attending the birth of Gautama represent the reactions to his personality of his early followers who were more devoted than discerning. There is, however, fundamental agreement between the Pāli Canon, the Ceylon Chronicles, and the Sanskrit works about the important events of his life, the picture of the world in which he moved, and the earliest form of his teaching. The stories of his childhood and youth have undoubtedly a mythical air, but there is no reason to distrust the traditional accounts of his lineage. He was born in the year 563 B.C.,¹ the son of Śuddhodana of the Kṣatriya clan known as Śākyā of Kapilavastu, on the Nepalese border, one hundred miles north of Benares. The spot was afterwards marked by the emperor Aśoka with a column which is still standing.² His own name is Siddhārtha, Gautama being his family name. The priests who were present at his birth said that he would be an emperor (*cakravartin*) if

¹ Tradition is unanimous that he died in his eightieth year, and this date is assigned to 483 B.C. Vincent Smith thinks that he died about 543 B.C. See *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1918, p. 547; *Oxford History of India* (1923), p. 48

² It bears an inscription: 'When King Devānampriya Priyadarśin [Aśoka's title in inscriptions] had been anointed twenty years, he came himself and worshipped this spot, because Buddha Śākyamuni was born here... He caused a stone pillar to be set up (in order to show) that the Blessed one was born here.' (Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka* (1925), p. 164)

he should consent to reign ; he would become a Buddha, if he adopted the life of a wandering ascetic. Evidently the same individual could not be both an emperor and a Buddha, for renunciation of worldly career was regarded as an indispensable preliminary for serious religion. We learn from the *Sutta Nipāta* the story of an aged seer named Asita who came to see the child, and more or less in the manner of Simeon prophesied the future greatness of the child, and wept at the thought that he himself would not live to see it and hear the new gospel. The mother died seven days after the birth of the child, and her sister Mahāprajāpatī, Suddhodana's second wife, brought up the baby. In due course Gautama married his cousin Yaśodharā¹ and had a son Rāhula. The story that Gautama's father was particular that his son should be spared depressing experiences and that chance or the will of the gods set in his path an old man broken and decrepit, a sick man, a dead man and a wandering ascetic, which last inspired him with the desire to seek in the religious life peace and serenity, indicates that Gautama was of a religious temperament and found the pleasures and ambitions of the world unsatisfying. The ideal of the mendicant life attracted him and we hear frequently in his discourses of the 'highest goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen leave their homes and go forth into homelessness'.²

¹ Other names are also mentioned, Bhaddakaccā, Gopā.

² Cf. the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* : 'Knowing him, the ātman, the Brāhmins relinquish the desire for posterity, the desire

The efforts of his father to turn his mind to secular interests failed, and at the age of twenty-nine he left his home, put on the ascetic's garb and started his career as a wandering seeker of truth. This was the great renunciation.¹ It is difficult for us in this secular age to realize the obsession of religion for the Indian mind and the ardours and agonies which it was willing to face for gaining the religious end. Gautama's search led him to become the disciple of the Brāhmin ascetics Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, who instructed him in their own doctrine (*dharma*) and discipline (*vinaya*). He possibly learnt from them the need for belief, good conduct and the practice of meditation, though the content of their teaching seemed to him unsound. The cure for the sorrows of the world was not to be found in the endless logomachies of the speculative thinkers. Determined to attain illumination by the practice of asceticism, he withdrew with five disciples to Uruvelā, 'a pleasant spot and a beautiful forest', soothing to the senses and stimulating to the mind. It is a general assumption in India that a holy life is led most easily in peaceful and beautiful landscapes which give a sense of repose and inspiration. Her temples and monasteries are on the banks of rivers or tops of hills, and all her emphasis on piety never made her forget the importance of scenery and climate for the effort of religion. In this beautiful for possessions, the desire for worldly prosperity and go forth as mendicants' (*bhikṣācaryām caranti*). (iii. 5)

¹ In the later legend his separation from his wife becomes the theme of an affecting tale.

site Gautama chose to devote himself to the severest forms of asceticism. Just as fire cannot be produced by friction from damp wood, but only from dry wood, seekers whose passions are not calmed, he thought, cannot attain enlightenment. He accordingly started a series of severe fasts, practised exercises of meditation, and inflicted on himself terrible austerities. Weakness of body brought on lassitude of spirit. Though often during this period he found himself at death's door, he got no glimpse of the riddle of life. He therefore decided that asceticism was not the way to enlightenment and tried to think out another way to it. He remembered how once in his youth he had an experience of mystic contemplation, and now tried to pursue that line. Legend tells us that, at this crisis, Gautama was assailed by Māra, the tempter, who sought in vain, by all manner of terrors and temptations, to shake him from his purpose. These indicate that his inner life was not undisturbed and continuous, and it was with a mental struggle that he broke away from old beliefs to try new methods. He persisted in his meditations¹ and passed through the four stages of contemplation culminating in pure self-possession and equanimity. He saw the whole universe as a system of law, composed of striving creatures, happy or unhappy, noble or mean, continually passing away from one form of

¹ Cf. *Lalitavistāra*:

'ihāsane śuṣyatu me śarīram
 tvagasthimāṁsam pralayam ca yātu
 aprāpya bodhim bahukalpa durlabhām
 naivāsanāt kāyam etat calisyati.'

existence and taking shape in another. In the last watch of the night 'ignorance was destroyed, knowledge had arisen . . . as I sat there, earnest, strenuous, resolute.' Gautama had attained *bodhi* or illumination and became the Buddha, the enlightened one.¹

While the Buddha was hesitating whether he should attempt to proclaim his teaching, the Scriptures say that the deity Brahmā besought him to preach the truth. This means, perhaps, that as he was debating within himself as to what he should do, he received warning, somewhat similar to that delivered by the demon of Socrates, against withdrawal from life. He concludes that 'the doors of immortality are open. Let them that have ears to hear show faith,' and starts on his ministry. He not merely preached, which is easy, but lived the kind of life which he taught men should live. He adopted a mendicant missionary's life with all its dangers of poverty, unpopularity and opposition. He converted in the first place the five disciples who had borne him company in the years of his asceticism, and in the deer park, 'where ascetics were allowed to dwell and animals might not be killed', at the modern Sārnāth, he preached his first sermon. Disciples began to flock to him. At the end of three months there were sixty, including the beloved Ānanda, the companion of all his wanderings. He said to them one day : 'Go now and wander for

¹ The name 'Buddha' is a title like Christ or Messiah: only it is not confined to one individual. On the site in Bodhgayā, where Gautama is said to have attained enlightenment, stands the Mahābodhi temple.

the gain of many, for the welfare of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle and glorious in the end, in the spirit and in the letter: proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness.' The Buddha himself travelled far and wide for forty-five years and gathered many followers. Brāhmins and monks, hermits and outcasts, noble ladies and repentant sinners joined the community. Much of the Buddha's activity was concerned with the instruction of his disciples and the organization of the Order. In our times, he would be taken for an intellectual. When we read his discourses, we are impressed by his spirit of reason. His ethical path has for its first step right views, a rational outlook. He endeavours to brush aside all cobwebs that interfere with mankind's vision of itself and its destiny. He questions his hearers who appear full of wisdom, though really without it, challenges them to relate their empty words of vague piety to facts. It was a period when many professed to have direct knowledge of God. They tell us with assurance not only whether He is or is not but also what He thinks, wills, and does. The Buddha convicts many of them of putting on spiritual airs. In the *Tevijja Sutta* he declares that the teachers who talk about Brahmā have not seen him face to face. They are like a man in love who cannot say who the lady is, or like one who builds a staircase without knowing where the palace is to be, or like one wishing to cross a river who should

call the other side to come to him.¹ Many of us have the religious sense and disposition, but are not clear as to the object to which this sense is directed. Devotion, to be reasonable, must be founded on truth. The Buddha explains to them the significance of *brahmavihāra*, or dwelling with Brahmā, as a certain kind of meditation, a state of mind where love utterly free from hatred and malice obtains for all. It is not, of course, *nirvāna* to which the eight-fold path is the means.

In view of the variety of counsel he advised his disciples to test by logic and life the different programmes submitted to them and not to accept anything out of regard for their authors. He did not make an exception of himself. He says: 'Accept not what you hear by report, accept not tradition: do not hastily conclude that "it must be so". Do not accept a statement on the ground that it is found in our books, nor on the supposition that "this is acceptable", nor because it is the saying of your teacher.'² With a touching solicitude he begs his followers not to be hampered in their thought by the prestige of his name. 'Such faith have I, Lord,' said Sāriputta, 'that methinks there never has been nor will be nor is now any other greater

¹ *Dīgha*, i. 235

² 'This I have said to you, O Kālāmās, but you may accept it, not because it is a report, not because it is a tradition, not because it is so said in the past, not because it is given from the scripture, not for the sake of discussion, not for the sake of a particular method, not for the sake of careful consideration, not for the sake of forbearing with wrong views, not because it appears to be suitable, not because your preceptor

or wiser than the Blessed One.' 'Of course, Sāriputta,' is the reply, 'you have known all the Buddhas of the past?' 'No, Lord.' 'Well then, you know those of the future?' 'No, Lord.' 'Then at least you know me and have penetrated my mind thoroughly?' 'Not even that, Lord.' 'Then why, Sāriputta, are your words so grand and bold?' There is nothing esoteric about his teaching. He speaks with scorn of those who profess to have secret truths. 'O disciples, there are three to whom secrecy belongs and not openness. Who are they? Secrecy belongs to women, not openness; secrecy belongs to priestly wisdom, not openness, secrecy belongs to false doctrine, not openness.... The doctrines and the rules proclaimed by the perfect Buddha shine before all the world and not

is a recluse, but if you yourselves understand that this is so meritorious and blameless, and when accepted, is for benefit and happiness, then you may accept it.' 'iti kho Kālāmā yām tam avocumha—ettha tumhe Kālāmā mā anussavena mā paramparāyā mā itikirāyā vā mā piṭakasampādānena mā takahetu mā nayahetu ākāra-parivitakkena mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā mā bhavyarūpatāya mā samaṇo no garūti, yadā tumhe Kālāmā attanā vā jāneyyātha—ime dhammā kusalā ime dhammā anavajjā ime dhammā viññuppasthā ime dhammā samattā samādinnā hitāya sukhāya samvattantīti atha tumhe Kālāmā upasampajja vihareyyāthā ti—iti yām tam vuttam idam etam patīcca vuttam.' (*Anguttara*, iii, 653)

Cf. also: 'As the wise test gold by burning, cutting and rubbing it (on a piece of touchstone), so are you to accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard for me.'

‘tāpāc chedāc ca nikāṣāt suvarṇam iva paṇḍitaiḥ
parīkṣya bhikṣavo grāhyam madvaco na tu gauravāt.’

(*Jñānasāra-samuccaya*, 31)

in secret.' Speaking to his disciple Ānanda shortly before his death, the Buddha says: 'I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine; for in respect of the truths, Ānanda, the Tathāgata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back.'¹ In many of his discourses he is represented as arguing with his interlocutors in a more or less Socratic manner, and persuading them insensibly to accept positions different from those from which they started. He would not let his adherents refuse the burden of spiritual liberty. They must not abandon the search for truth by accepting an authority. They must be free men able to be a light and a help to themselves. He continues: 'Be ye as those who have the self as their light. Be ye as those who have the self as their refuge. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as to a refuge.'² The highest seat of authority is the voice of the spirit in us. There is little of what we call dogma in the Buddha's teaching. With a breadth of view rare in that age and not common in ours he refuses to stifle criticism. Intolerance seemed to him the greatest enemy of religion. Once he entered a public hall at Ambalatthika and found some of his disciples talking of a Brāhmin who had just been accusing Gautama of impiety and finding fault with the order of mendicants he had founded. 'Brethren,' said Gautama, 'if others speak against me,

¹ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, 32.

² "attadīpa attasarana, anaññasarāṇa; dhammadīpa dhammasarāṇa." (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, 33; see also 35)

or against my religion, or against the Order, there is no reason why you should be angry, discontented, or displeased with them. If you are so, you will not only bring yourselves into danger of spiritual loss, but you will not be able to judge whether what they say is correct or not correct—a most enlightened sentiment, even after 2,500 years of energetic enlightenment. Doctrines are not more or less true simply because they happen to flatter or wound our prejudices. There was no paradox, however strange, no heresy, however extreme, that the Buddha was unwilling or afraid to consider. He was sure that the only way to meet the confusion and extravagance of the age was by patient sifting of opinions and by helping men to rebuild their lives on a foundation of reason. He denounced unfair criticism of other creeds. 'It is', he said, 'as a man who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle does not soil the heaven, but comes back and defiles his own person.'

There was never an occasion when the Buddha flamed forth in anger, never an incident when an unkind word escaped his lips. He had vast tolerance for his kind. He thought of the world as ignorant rather than wicked, as unsatisfactory rather than rebellious. He meets opposition with calm and confidence. There is no nervous irritability or fierce anger about him. His conduct is the perfect expression of courtesy and good feeling with a spice of irony in it. On one of his rounds he was repulsed by a householder with bitter words of abuse. He replied: 'Friend, if a householder sets food before a beggar, but the beggar refuses to accept the

food, to whom does the food then belong?' The man replied: 'Why, to the householder of course.' The Buddha said: 'Then, if I refuse to accept your abuse and ill will, it returns to you, does it not? But I must go away the poorer because I have lost a friend.'¹ Conversion by compulsion was unknown to him. Practice, not belief, is the foundation of his system. He wished to create a temper and a habit. We are unhappy because of our foolish desires. To make ourselves happy all that is necessary is to make ourselves a new heart and see with new eyes. If we suppress evil thoughts and cultivate good ones, a bad unhappy mind can be made into a good happy one. The Buddha is not concerned with changes of creed. He sits by the sacred fire of a Brāhmin and gives a discourse on his views without denouncing his worship. When Siha the Jain becomes a Buddhist he is required to give food and gifts as before to the Jain monks who frequent his house.² With a singular gentleness he presents his views and leaves the rest to the persuasive power of truth.

The great hero of moral achievement is frequently called upon to decide trivial matters of monastic discipline. To found an organization is to come to terms with the world and concede to social needs. It is to provide a refuge for those who are not quite at home in the ordinary life of society. There were troubles within the Order. Gautama's cousin, Devadatta, wished to supersede him

¹ *Majjhima*, 75

² *Mahāvagga*, vi. 31. 11

as the head of the Order and plotted against him, but he was forgiven. On one occasion the Buddha found a monk suffering from dysentery and lying in filth. He washed him and changed his bed with the help of his companion Ānanda and said to his disciples : 'Whoever, O monks, would nurse me should nurse the sick man.' There were no distinctions of caste in the Buddhist Order. 'Just as, O monks, the great rivers such as the Ganges, the Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhū and Māhī when they fall into the ocean lose their former names and clans and are known as the ocean, even so do the four castes of Kṣatriyas, Brāhmins, Vaiśyas, and Sūdras, when they have gone forth in the Doctrine and Discipline taught by the Tathāgata, from a home to a homeless life, lose their former names and clans (*nāmagotra*) and are known as ascetics.'¹ In his time women were not secluded in India, and he declared that they were quite capable of attaining sanctity and holiness. In the last year of his life he dined with the courtesan Ambapālī. But he had considerable hesitation in admitting women to the Order. 'How, Lord, are we to conduct ourselves with regard to womankind?' 'Don't see them, Ānanda.' 'But if we see them, what are we to do?' 'Abstain from speech.' 'But if they should speak to us, what are we to do?' 'Keep wide awake.' Ānanda was quite chivalrous, pleaded the cause of women for admission into the Order, and won the

¹ *Udāna*, v. 5. Cf. *Muṇḍaka Up.* : 'Like as rivers flowing into the ocean disappear abandoning name and form (*nāmarūpa*), so he that knows, being freed from name and form, attains to the divine person beyond the beyond.' (iii. 2. 8)

consent of the Master. It was the right course but perhaps not quite expedient. 'If, Ananda, women had not received permission to enter the Order, the pure religion would have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast a thousand years. But since they have received that permission, it will now stand fast for only five hundred years.'¹ For a woman entry into the religious Order required the assent of the relatives, while man was, at least in theory, at his own disposal. But the rules of the Order were by no means final. The Buddha says : 'When I am gone, let the Order, if it should so wish, abolish all the lesser and minor precepts.'

The story of his death is told with great pathos and simplicity in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. The Buddha was now eighty years old, worn out with toil and travel. At a village near the little town of Kusinagara, about 120 miles north-east of Benares, in 483 B.C., he passed away. The quiet end of the Buddha contrasts vividly with the martyr's deaths of Socrates and Jesus. All the three undermined, in different degrees, the orthodoxies of their time. As a matter of fact, the Buddha was more definitely opposed to Vedic orthodoxy and ceremonialism than was Socrates to the State religion of Athens,² or Jesus to Judaism, and yet he lived till eighty, gathered a large number of disciples, and founded

¹ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, v. 23

² Xenophon says that Socrates 'was frequently seen sacrificing at home and on the public altars of the city'. (*Memorabilia*, I. 1. 2) According to Plato the last words of Socrates were: 'Crito ! I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?' (*Phaedo*, 118)

a religious Order in his own lifetime. Perhaps the Indian temper of religion is responsible for the difference in the treatment of unorthodoxies.

II

The text of his first sermon has come down to us.¹ There is no reason to doubt that it contains the words and the ideas of the Buddha. Its teaching is quite simple. After observing that those who wish to lead a religious life should avoid the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and follow the middle way, he enunciates the four truths about sorrow, the cause of sorrow, the removal of sorrow, and the way leading to it.

i. 'Birth is sorrow. Decay is sorrow. Sickness is sorrow. Death is sorrow . . . To be conjoined to things which we dislike, to be separated from things which we like—that also is sorrow. Not to get what one wants,—that too is sorrow.' Birth and death, suffering and love are universal facts. They are the signs of a lack of harmony, of a state of discord. Conflict is at the root of man's misery, of his spiritual disease. It is a pervasive feature of all empirical existence, which is impermanent and transitory; and escape from it can, and must, be found.

¹ An examination of the Pāli Canon justifies us in regarding as originating with the Buddha himself the Benares sermon on the four noble truths and the eight-fold path, some of the speeches in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, some of the verses and short utterances handed down as the 'words of the Buddha' in the *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, and *Itivuttaka*, which are found in more or less the same form in the Sanskrit texts of Nepal and in Tibetan and Chinese translations.

2. Everything has a cause and produces an effect. This simple principle governs the whole universe, gods and men, heaven and earth. It is applicable not only to this vast universe stretching through boundless space, with its dazzling world systems and endless series of alternations of growth and decay, but also to the events of human life and affairs of history. If we can detect and eliminate the cause of suffering, suffering itself will disappear. The cause of it is *tanhā* (Sanskrit *trṣṇā*), craving for existence.¹ This truth is later elaborated in the chain of causation with twelve links.² Ignorance and craving are bound together as the theoretical and practical sides of one phenomenon. The rise of ignorance marks a rupture with life, a violation of its organic integrity. It shows itself in an exaggerated individualism, self-isolation and rebellion against the harmony of the world. Cravings and desires arise, tormenting the soul which they bind in chains and reducing it to a servitude from which it would fain escape. Ignorance is destroyed by intuition, desire by ethical striving.³

¹ Cf. *Brhadāraṇyaka Up.* : 'A person consists of desires, and as is his desire, so is his will; and as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap.' (iv. 4)

² 'By reason of ignorance dispositions; by reason of dispositions consciousness; by reason of consciousness name and form; by reason of name and form contact; by reason of contact feeling; by reason of feeling craving; by reason of craving grasping; by reason of grasping becoming; by reason of becoming birth; by reason of birth old age, death, grief, mourning, pain, sorrow and despair.' The sequence of the chain varies in different texts.

³ Cf. 'When the desires (*kāma*) that are in his heart cease then at once the mortal becomes immortal and obtains here in

Freedom from prejudice is a relative term and even the Buddha cannot lay claim to it in any absolute sense. He accepts as axiomatic *karma* and rebirth. As a man acts so shall he be. We are for ever making our own moral world for good or ill. Every thought, feeling and volition counts for something in our personal development. Mankind is for ever fashioning itself. The thoughts and acts of a remote and invisible past have actually produced the contents of our earth. The Buddha sees life as beneath the sovereignty of infinite righteousness. We can never escape the consequences of our deeds. Suffering of every kind, disease and loss, failure and disappointment, the wounds of affection and the frustration of purpose are all charged with moral significance and determined by the principle of moral causation. That there is a retribution for selfishness and reward of inward peace for unselfish life, that we shall be made to realize what we have done and in the expressive language of Ezekiel 'loathe ourselves for our iniquities' is the Buddha's deepest conviction. He says: 'My action is my possession: my action is my inheritance: my action is the matrix which bears me: my action

this world Brahman.' (*Katha Up.* iv. 10) Cf. *Dhammapada*: 'There is no fire like desire, there is no monster like hatred, there is no snare like folly; there is no torrent like covetousness.' (251) Cf. *Mahābhārata*: 'kāmabandhanam evedam nān-yad astiha bandhanam.' See also *Bhagavadgītā*, ii. 70, 71.

Again, *Itivuttaka* says: 'Whatever misfortunes there are here in this world or in the next, they all have their root in ignorance (*avijjāmūlaka*) and are given rise to by craving and desire.' (40)

is the race to which I belong: my action is my refuge.' The rule of law has a redeeming feature in that it removes ghastly visions of eternal hell. No place of doom can last for ever. Heaven and hell belong to the order of the finite and the impermanent. However intense and long they may be, they have an end, and how and when they end depends on ourselves. Every baser impulse turned into sweetness, every meaner motive mastered, every humbling weakness overcome counts in this effort. We should not, however, think that we need not be concerned with poverty or suffering on the assumption that people get only what they deserve and have brought it on themselves. If any one feels like that, if his nature has become opaque to the high brotherhood of all living creation, the law will deal with him sternly, for he has refused to become its agent for mercy and forgiveness. The working of the law is not due to the interference of any personal deity. Bewildering shadows of divine injustice and arbitrary caprice are ruled out.

The human person is a compound of body (*rūpa*), with its powers of movement and its organs of sense, of feelings (*vedanā*), of perception (*saṃjñā*), of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch by which he is in commerce with the external world; dispositions (*samskāra*) which include aptitudes, abilities, resulting from the past, providing an inheritance for good or ill from previous lives, and constituting a stock of character with which to start at a fresh birth; and summing them all up was thought (*vijñāna*) covering the whole group of mental activities from the most concrete ideation to the most abstract meditation.

The inner life of a person is only a succession of thoughts, desires, affections and passions, and when the corporeal bond which holds them together falls away at death, the unseen potencies beget a new person, psychologically if not physically continuous with the deceased, to suffer or enjoy what his predecessor had prepared for him by his behaviour. The elements which constitute the empirical individual are always changing, but they can never be totally dispersed until the power that holds them together and impels them to rebirth—the craving, the desire for separate existence—is extinguished.

If there is no permanent self, then who is affected by the works which the not-self has performed? The Buddha answers: 'Shall one who is under the dominion of desire think to go beyond the mind of the Master?'¹ In the early texts there is no explanation of this difficulty. There is only an assertion of psychical continuity.² He who understands the nature of the soul and its successive lives cannot regard any single life as of great importance in itself, though its consequences for the future may be momentous.

3. For the removal of ignorance a strict morality is essential. *Sīla* and *prajñā*, good conduct and intuitive insight, are inseparably united.

¹ *Saṃyutta*, iii. 103

² In the *Mahānidāna Sutta* there is a reference to the 'descent' of the consciousness into the womb of the mother preparatory to rebirth. Continuity of consciousness between the old and the new lives is asserted, and commentators differ in regard to the question of a corporeal accompaniment of the consciousness. Buddhaghosa, for example, denies that the consciousness is accompanied by a physical form.

The Buddha does not speak of codes and conventions, laws and rites. The way to be happy is to have a good heart and mind which will show itself in good deeds. Simple goodness in spirit and deed is the basis of his religion. He detaches the perfect life from all connexion with a deity or outside forces, and teaches man that the best and the worst that can happen to him lie within his own power. We frequently hear him say: 'Come, disciples, lead a holy life for the extinction of sorrow.' The noble eight-fold path represents a ladder of perfection. The first step is right views, knowledge of the four truths, which is not to be confused with the gnosis, *jñāna* of the *Upaniṣads* or the faith of the theists. But so long as the truths are known only in the intellect they have no life. They must be discovered and proved by every man in the depths of his own being. The first step is an awakening, a summons to abandon a way by which we miss our truth and destiny. It is not a casual change of opinion but a radical adjustment of nature which affects the very depths of the soul and leads to the second step of right aspirations towards renunciation, benevolence, and kindness.¹ It is to resolve

¹ *Dīgha*, i. 124. In *Majjhima*, 41, the Buddha says that the strong aspiration of a good man takes effect, 'if he should wish, after the destruction of the cardinal vices, to realize by his own transcendent knowledge in this present world initiation into, and abode in, the viceless deliverance of heart and intellect, it will come to pass.' Cf. *James*, v. 16: 'The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.' It is not the answer of God to a petition, but the response of cosmic law in early Buddhism.

to renounce pleasures, to bear no malice, and do no harm. Right speech requires us to abstain from lying, slander, abuse, harsh words and idle talk. Right action is to abstain from taking life, or taking what is not given, or from carnal excesses. Right living is to abstain from any of the forbidden modes of living, which are those of a trader in weapons, slave-dealer, butcher, publican, or poison-seller. The Buddha forbade his monks ever to become soldiers. The eight-fold path is more than a code of morality. It is a way of life. Right effort consists in suppressing the rising of evil states, in eradicating those which have arisen, in stimulating good states and perfecting those which have come into being. It is the beginning of mental cultivation. The habit of self-observation is an effective way to deal with the underworld of the human mind, to root out evil desires and cravings, to maintain an equilibrium between the conscious mind and the other part of our equipment, the complicated psychic and physical apparatus. Man is false and deceitful not merely in relation to others but to himself as well. We adopt ideas not always out of pure and disinterested motives, but through some kind of resentment or failure in life. We become vindictive and tyrannical because our pride has been wounded, or our love has been unrequited, or because we have had some humiliating physical deformity. The remarkable thing about man is that he often deceives himself. Many of us are machines most of the time. Our thoughts and feelings follow an habitual pattern. Through self-examination we attempt to break up

automatisms, destroy the reliance of the mind on habitual props and discover the self. Sloth and torpor are as harmful to spiritual progress as evil desires. Rightmindfulness is to look on the body and the spirit in such a way as to remain self-possessed and mindful, overcoming both hankering and dejection. It is self-mastery by means of self-knowledge which allows nothing to be done mechanically or heedlessly. It is to see things under the aspect of eternity. Right contemplation takes the form of the four meditations. There is a curious impression that the Buddha's prescription for good life is the cessation of activity, desiring little and doing nothing. The resolve to win the saving truth, the efforts needful for its attainment, the lives spent in the practice of virtue, the unrelaxing tension of will maintained through constant temptation to aim at less than the highest, all rest on the certitude that the human will is capable of heroic endeavour and achievement. Meditation is an act of attention, an effort of will. It is not passive reverie but intense striving, concentration of mind in which will and thought become fused. According to the Buddha's teaching each man will have to find salvation, in the last resort, alone and with his own will, and he needs all the will in the world for so formidable an effort. The general impression that the mystic experience is granted and not achieved is far from correct, except in the sense that all great moments of experience are in a measure given. The mystic is not so much passive as receptive. His life is one of strenuous discipline. Right contemplation is the end and the crown of the eight-fold path. When

the mind and the senses are no longer active, when discursive thought ceases, we get the highest and purest state of the soul when it enjoys the untrammelled bliss of its own nature. It is the substance of the highest life when ignorance and craving become extinct and insight and holiness take their place. It is peaceful contemplation and ecstatic rapture wrought by the mind for itself. It is the true and healthy life of the soul, in which we have a foretaste of a higher existence compared with which our ordinary life is sick and ailing. We have in it a sense of freedom, of knowledge, immediate and unbounded.

The Buddha gives a workable system for monks and lay people. In the discourse to the Brāhmin Kūṭadanta he lays down five moral rules binding on all lay people, which are: refraining from killing, from taking what is not given, from wrongful indulgence in the passions, from lying, and from intoxicants. It is not abstention from work that he demands. A Jain layman asks him if he teaches the doctrine of in-action, and the Buddha replies: 'How might one rightly say of me that the ascetic Gautama holds the principle of in-action? I proclaim the non-doing of evil conduct of body, speech, and thought. I proclaim the non-doing of various kinds of wicked and evil things. . . . I proclaim the doing of good conduct of the body, speech and thought. I proclaim the doing of various kinds of good things.' In the Buddha's scheme of ethics, the spirit of love is more important than good works. 'All good works whatever are not worth one-sixteenth part of love which sets free the heart. Love which

sets free the heart comprises them. It shines, gives light and radiance.' 'As a mother, at the risk of her life, watches over her only child, so let every one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings.' Respect for animal life is an integral part of morality. A good Buddhist does not kill animals for pleasure or eat flesh. They are his humble brethren and not lower creatures over whom he has dominion by divine right. Serenity of spirit and love for all sentient creation are enjoined by the Buddha. He does not speak of sin, but only of ignorance and foolishness which could be cured by enlightenment and sympathy.

4. When the individual overcomes ignorance, breaks the power of his own deeds to drag him back into expiation, ceases to desire¹ and to regret and attains enlightenment, he passes into the world of being as distinct from that of existence, being which is free from form and formlessness, from pain and delight, though that state is not humanly conceivable. It is deliverance, freedom from rebirth, *nirvāna*. The Buddha refused to explain its nature. The question is unprofitable and perhaps our descriptions of it unmeaning. What it would be like no words could tell, but the Buddha shows how it could be reached. He promises the beatific vision in this life to those who adopt his way. He does not mention ceremonial, austerities, gods

¹ Cf. 'yada sarve pramucyante kāma, ye'sya hṛdi sthitāḥ
atha martyo'mṛto bhavati, atra brahma samaśnute.'

'When all desires which entered one's heart are abandoned, then does the mortal become immortal, and he obtains Brahman.' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* iv. 4)



—one or many—or even a worship of himself. He is the discoverer, the teacher of the truth. He concentrates his teaching on the moral discipline and would not enter into metaphysical discussions with the crowd of contemporary sophists. Whether the world was infinite in space or limited, whether it had an origin in time or not, whether the person who had attained truth had or had not individuality, or would or would not live after death, the Buddha would not discuss.

The Buddha 'has no theories'.¹ He does not claim to have come down to earth with a wisdom which had been his from all eternity. According to his own account, as the *Jātaka* stories relate, he acquired it through innumerable lives of patient effort.² He offers his followers a scheme of spiritual development and not a set of doctrines, a way and not a creed. He knew that the acceptance of a creed was generally an excuse for the abandonment of the search. We often refuse to admit facts, not because there is evidence against them, but because there is a theory against them. The Buddha's teaching begins with the fact of his enlightenment, a spiritual experience which cannot be put into words. Whatever doctrine there is in him relates to this experience and the way of attaining it. To use an image employed by him—our theories of the eternal are as valuable as are those which a chick which has not broken its way through its shell

¹ *Majjhima*, i. 486

² *Anguttara*, iv. 36, says that Buddha is the redeemed soul who is not subject to any bonds.

might form of the outside world. To know the truth, we must tread the path.

In this he resembles some of the greatest thinkers of the world. Socrates replied to the charge of 'corrupting the young' that he had no 'doctrine', that Meletus had not produced any evidence, either from his pupils or their relations, to show that they had suffered from his 'doctrine'.¹ Jesus had an abhorrence of dogma. It was not a creed that he taught, or a Church that he established. His aim was to show a new way of life. The cross was the symbol of the new religion, not the creed. Bearing the cross is the condition of discipleship. It stands for a new way of overcoming evil with good, demands a change of outlook, a rejection of instinctive egoisms and of the earthly standards of glory and greatness. St. Paul gives us the 'fruit of the spirit', 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance', and contrasts them with 'the works of the flesh', which are 'idolatry, hatred, variance, jealousies, wrath, strife, envyings, murders and such like'.² St. Thomas Aquinas experienced in the last year of his life a prolonged ecstacy, as a result of which he refused to write any more, despite the entreaties of his secretary, Reginald. Robert Bridges in *The Testament of Beauty* describes the incident thus :

I am happier in surmising that his vision at Mass
—in Naples it was when he fell suddenly in trance—
was some disenthralment of his humanity;

¹ *Apology*, 22

² *Galatians*, v. 22-3, 20-1

for thereafter, whether 'twre Aristotle or Christ
that had appear'd to him then, he nevermore wrote word
neither dictated but laid by inkhorn and pen ;
and was as a man out of hearing on thatt day
when Reynaldus, with all the importunity of zeal
and intimacy of friendship, would hav recall'd him
to his incompletions SUMMA ; and sighing he reply'd

*I wil tell thee a secrect, my son, constraining thee
lest thou dare impart it to any man while I liv.
My writing is at end. I hav seen such things reveal'd
that what I hav written and taught seemeth to me of small worth.
And hence I hope in my God, that, as of doctrin
ther wil be speedily also an end of Life !*

We have now seen with approximate certainty
on the strength of the available evidence what the
oldest traditions disclose to us of the life and
teaching of the Buddha. Though his character and
teaching suited admirably his religious world, his
elemental simplicity, active love, and personal help
in offering to men a way to happiness and escape
from sorrow caused his contemporaries and future
generations to regard him as a saviour.¹ By refusing
to make positive statements on the ultimate pro-
blems on the ground that their solutions escape
definition, he helped to provoke doctrinal contro-
versies. To satisfy the needs of less strenuous tem-
peraments who had also their rights, varieties of
Buddhism less severe and philosophic developed.

III

To know what the Buddha actually taught or
what his earliest followers thought he did, we must

¹ In the *Mahāpadāna Suttanta* we have the most categorical affirmation of the divine character of the Buddha.

place ourselves in imagination in the India of the sixth century B.C. Thinkers, like other people, are in no small measure rooted in time and place. The forms in which they cast their ideas, no less than the ways in which they behave, are largely moulded by the habits of thought and action which they find around them. Great minds make individual contributions of permanent value to the thought of their age; but they do not, and cannot, altogether transcend the age in which they live. The questions which they try to answer are those their contemporaries are asking; the solutions which they give are relative to the traditional statements handed down to them. Even when they are propounding answers which are startlingly new, they use the inadequate ideas and concepts of tradition to express the deeper truths towards which they are feeling their way. They do not cease to belong to their age even when they are rising most above it. Thought makes no incongruous leaps; it advances to new concepts by the reinterpretation of old ones. Gautama the Buddha has suffered as much as any one from critics without a sense of history. He has been cried up, and cried down, with an equal lack of historical imagination. Buddhism came to be widely known in the West in the latter part of the last century when a wave of scepticism spread over the world as the result of the growth of science and enlightenment. Positivism, agnosticism, atheism and ethical humanism found wide support. In much of the literature of doubt and disbelief the name of the Buddha is mentioned with respect. The humanists honour him as one of the earliest protagonists of

their cause—the happiness, the dignity and the mental integrity of mankind. Those who declare that men cannot know reality, and others who affirm that there is no reality to know, use his name. Intellectual agnostics who flirt with a vague transcendentalism quote his example. Social idealists, ethical mystics, rationalist prophets are all attracted by his teaching and utilize it in their defence. Great as is the value of the Buddha's teaching for our age, we cannot hope to understand its true significance without an adequate reference to the environment in which he lived. This effort of historical imagination is not easy. For the simple words and concepts with which the Buddha faced the situations of his life and ministry have become charged with the controversies and developments of later generations. Naturally we are inclined to read some of his utterances with the later doctrines in our minds. All great thought, religious or philosophical, is capable of bearing many meanings which were not in the minds of their authors. To set aside, for the moment, the later interpretations and seek, instead, to view the Buddha, as far as we can, as a thinker of the sixth century B.C., living, moving and teaching in its peculiar conditions, is a task of extreme difficulty and delicacy; and the work of reconstruction can never be complete for obvious reasons. But we may be reasonably certain that it yields a picture which, in its main outlines at least, must correspond fairly well to the reality. If we place ourselves in imagination in the India of the sixth century B.C., we find that different streams of thought, belief and practice—animism, magic and

superstition—were tending to unite in a higher monistic idealism. Man's attempt to seek the truth and put himself in a right relation to it assumed the forms of dualistic and pluralistic experiments, but they were all agreed on certain fundamentals. Life does not begin at birth or end at death, but is a link in an infinite series of lives, each of which is conditioned and determined by acts done in previous existences. Animal, human and angelic forms are all links in the chain. By good deeds we raise our status and get to heaven, and by evil ones we lower it. Since all lives must come to an end, true happiness is not to be sought in heaven or on earth. Release from the round of births resulting in life in eternity is the goal of the religious man and is indicated by such words as *mokṣa* or deliverance, union with Brahman, and *nirvāṇa*.

The methods for gaining release were variously conceived. At least four main ones could be distinguished: (1) the Vedic hymns declare that prayer and worship are the best means for gaining the favour of the Divine. (2) The most popular was the sacrificial system which arose out of simple offerings to the deity and became complicated in the age before the *Upaniṣads*. While its inadequacy was admitted by the *Upaniṣads*, it was tolerated as a method useful for attaining temporal blessings and even life in a paradise. (3) Asceticism was popular with certain sects.¹ By means of temperance, chastity and mental concentration one can increase the force of thought and will. The advo-

¹ *Rg Veda*, x. 136; x. 190

cates of the ascetic path were betrayed into the extravagance that, by suppressing desires and enduring voluntary tortures, one could attain supernatural powers. *Tapas* or austerity is said to be better than sacrifice,¹ and is regarded as the means for attaining the knowledge of Brahman.² (4) The *Upaniṣads* insist on *vidyā*, or wisdom, or insight into reality, accompanied by control of desire and detachment from earthly ties and interests. *Vidyā* is not learning, but rapt contemplation; it is a realization of one's unity with the Supreme Spirit, in the light of which all material attachments and fetters fall away. The Buddha, who teaches 'the middle path' between self-indulgence and self-mortification, inclines to the last view.

The *Upaniṣads* from which the Buddha's teaching is derived³ hold that the world we know, whether outward or inward, does not possess intrinsic reality. Intrinsic reality belongs to the knower, the *Ātman*, the self of all selves. Brahman and

¹ *Chāndogya Up.* iii. 17

² *Taittirīya Up.* iii. 1, 5

³ The Buddha says that 'there are these four truths of the Brāhmins which have been realized by me by my own higher knowledge and made known'. (*Anguttara*, iv. 185; *Sāmyutta*, xxii. 90) He characterizes his *dharma* as ancient (*purāṇa*)—as eternal (*sāśvata* or *sanātana*). He compares it to the discovery of an old buried forgotten city. (*Nagara Sutta*) He is said to be a knower of the Veda (*vedajña*) or of the Vedānta (*vedāntajña*). (*Sāmyutta*, i. 168; *Sutta Nipāta*, 463) Max Müller observes that Buddhism is 'the highest Brāhmanism popularised, everything esoteric being abolished, the priesthood replaced by monks, and these monks being in their true character the successors and representatives of the enlightened dwellers in the forest of former ages'. (*Last Essays*, second series (1901), p. 121)

Ātman are one. Knowledge of this supreme truth, realization of the identity of the self of man and the spirit of the universe, is salvation. It is a state of being, not a place of resort, a quality of life to be acquired by spiritual training and illumination. Till this goal is reached man is subject to the law of *karma* and rebirth. Under the shadow of the fundamental thesis of the unity of the individual spirit with the universal spirit numberless dogmas developed, in which the special god of the devotee was identified with the universal spirit. The Buddha accepts the propositions that the empirical universe is not real, that the empirical individual is not permanent, that both these are subject to changes which are governed by a law and that it is the duty of the individual to transcend this world of succession and time and attain *nirvāṇa*. Whether there is anything real and positive in the universe, in the individual and in the state of liberation, he declined to tell us, though he denied the dogmatic theologies. The Upaniṣads contrast the absolute fullness of limitless perfection with the world of plurality—a state of disruption, restriction, and pain. If there is a difference between the teaching of the Upaniṣads and the Buddha, it is not in their views of the world of experience (*samsāra*), but in regard to their conception of reality (*nirvāṇa*).

Before we take up the question of the meaning of the Buddha's silence, let us understand his motive for it. The supremacy of the ethical is the clue to the teaching of the Buddha. His conceptions of life and the universe are derived from his severely practical outlook. The existence of everything

depends on a cause. If we remove the cause, the effect will disappear. If the source of all suffering is destroyed, suffering will disappear. The cure proposed by the sacrificial and the sacramental religions which filled his environment¹ has little to do with the disease. The only way in which we can remove the cause of suffering is by purifying the heart and following the moral law. Doctrines which take away from the urgency of the moral task, the cultivation of individual character, are repudiated by the Buddha.

If what the *Upaniṣads* declare is true, that we are divine, then there is nothing for us to aim at or strive for. The *Jaina* and the *Sāṃkhya* theories maintain an infinity of souls involved in matter. For them the duty of man would consist in ascetic practices by which the unchangeable essence could be freed from the changing trammels. Whether we believe with the *Upaniṣads* in one universal spirit, or with the *Sāṃkhya* system in an infinite plurality of spirits, the nature of the spirit is conceived as unchanging and unchangeable. But ethical training implies the possibility of change. Man is not

¹Cf. 'plavāhy etā adṛḍhā yajñarūpāh.' 'Sacrifices are frail boats across the ocean of *samsāra*.' (*Muṇḍaka Up.* i. 2. 7) Again: 'nānudhyāyād bahūn śabdān vāco viglāpanam hi tat.' 'Brood not over this mass of words, for it is a waste of breath.' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* iv. 4. 21; see also iii. 8. 10) When a Brāhmin came to the Buddha with the remnants of his oblation in his hand, the Buddha said to him: 'Do not deem, O Brāhmin, that purity comes by merely laying sticks in fire, for it is external. Having therefore left that course, I kindle my fire only within, which burns for ever.' 'Here in this sacrifice the tongue is the sacrificial spoon and the heart is the altar of the fire.' (*Samyutta*, i. 168)

divine, but has to become divine. His divine status is something to be built up by good thoughts, good words and good deeds. He is a concrete, living, striving creature. To tell him that there is a transcendental consciousness where scepticism and relativity are defeated from all eternity is not of much comfort. It is the concrete man, not the transcendental self, that has to acquire morality. The proposition that there is no permanent unchanging self in persons or things (*sarvam anātmam*) is not a speculative theory, or a sentimental outburst on the transitoriness of the world, but the basis of all ethics. We have to build the self by effort and discipline. The self is something which evolves and grows, something to be achieved and built up by pain and labour, and not something given to be passively accepted and enjoyed. The ego consists of the feelings that burn us, of the passions we brood over, of the desires that haunt us and of the decisions we make. These are the things that give life its dramatic character. There is nothing absolute and permanent in them. That is why we can become something different from what we are. The reality of the person is in the creative will. When we deny the clamour of emotions, stay the stream of things, silence the appetites of the body, we feel the power of self within our own being. Again, the delusion of self leads man to strive to profit himself and injure others. The passionate sense of egoism is the root of the world's unhappiness.¹ To be egoistic is to be

¹ Nāgārjuna says that, when the notion of self disappears, the notion of mine also disappears and one becomes free from the idea of I and mine;

like a rudimentary creature that has grown no eyes. It is to be blind to the reality of other persons. We begin to grow only when we break down our clinging to the envelopes of the body and mind and realize that we have our roots in a state which is untouched by the familiar dimensions of this world. Detachment from ego means a gentler, profounder sympathy with all sentient creation. It is the recovery of wholeness, of an ordered nature in harmony with the cosmos.

The Buddha denies the view that the ego is permanent and unchanging, as well as the view that at death it is utterly destroyed. For if death ends all, many people might imagine that it was not necessary to increase the burden of this short life by the need for self-control. The ego is a composite, existent and changing.

Interest in the supernatural diverts attention and energy from ethical values and the exploration of actual conditions by means of which their realization may be furthered. The Buddha learnt from life around him that men never use the powers they possess to advance the good in life so long as they wait upon some agency external to themselves to do the work they are responsible for doing. They expect the exercise of divine magic for a sudden transmutation into a higher kind of nature. Dependence on an external power has generally meant a surrender of human effort. The Buddha did not deny the existence of the popular gods, but

‘ātmany asati cātmīyam kuta eva bhaviṣyati
nirmaīmo nirahaṅkārah śamād ātmātmaninayoh.’
(*Mādhyamikakārikā*, xviii. 2. Cf. *Bhagavadgītā*, ii. 71)

he treated them as angels who belonged to the empirical order and needed instruction themselves. By precept and example, he was an exponent of the strenuous life.¹ The whole course of the universe is governed by law. It is unnecessary to make the divine creator responsible for the strange disproportion in men's lives.² The Buddha rejects the conception of God as a personal being who takes sides in our struggles or a supernatural tyrant who interferes with the process of the universe. Theistic emphasis seemed to him to deprive man of his independence and make him an instrument for the realization of ends that are not human. The vital problem for the Buddha was not how the world-spirit, if any, manifests itself in the superhuman

¹ Cf. Aśoka's saying : 'Let small and great exert themselves.' (*First Edict*)

² Cf. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* :

'sukhasya duḥkhasya na kopi dātā
paro dadātīti kubuddhir eṣā
svayam kṛtam svena phalena yujyate
śarīra he nistara yat tvayā kṛtam.'

(No one gives joy or sorrow. That others give us these is an erroneous conception. Our own deeds bring to us their fruits. Body of mine, repay by suffering.)

An early Buddhist poet bursts out in fierce anger :

' He who has eyes can see the sickening sight ;
Why does not Brahmā set his creatures right ?
If his wide power no limits can restrain ;
Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless ?
Why are his creatures all condemned to pain ?
Why does he not to all give happiness ?
Why do fraud, lies and ignorance prevail ?
Why triumphs falsehood—truth and justice fail ? '

(The *Jātaka*, E.T. by Cowell & Rouse, vol. vi (1907), p. 110)

realm, but in the individual man and in the empirical world. What controls the universe is *dharma*, the moral law. The world is made, not by gods and angels, but by the voluntary choices of men. The history of man is the total sequence of human lives, their decisions and experiences. The situation which each of us finds in the world when he enters it is due to the innumerable actions of men and women in the past ; and we, by our will and action, each in his own measure, can determine what the next moment in history is going to be. The Buddha knows—and none better—that the human will is not omnipotent ; it works in a material, animal and social environment which impinges at every point on the life of man, though he, by his will and exertion, can modify and reshape to some extent his environment. This continual interaction between man and his environment is the texture of which history is woven. Human effort counts.

The object of religion is ideal in contrast to the present state. *Dharma* is the unity of all ideal ends, arousing us to desire and action. It controls us because of its inherent meaning and value, and not because it is already in realized existence apart from us. The reality of *dharma* is vouched for by its undeniable power in action. The Buddha insists that it is not wholly without roots in existence. He objects, however, to any identification of *dharma* with a being outside of nature. To imagine that *dharma* or the ideal of morality is external to nature is to imply that the natural means are corrupt and impotent. It is to make out that man in a state of nature is evil, and regeneration is a matter of grace.

The improvement of human character will not be regarded as the natural result of human effort, but will be viewed as a sudden and complete transmutation achieved through the aid of the supernatural. For the Buddha, the impulse to *dharma*, to justice and kindness is operative in things, and its efficient activity will mean the reduction of disorder, cruelty and oppression. *Dharma* is organic to existence and its implication of *karma* is the builder of the world. There is not in the Buddha's teaching that deep personal loyalty, passion of love and intimate dialogue between soul and soul resembling closely in its expression earthly love. And yet the essence of religion, the vision of a reality which stands beyond and within the passing flux of immediate things, the intuitive loyalty to something larger than and beyond oneself, an absolute active in the world, is in him.

IV

The Buddha discouraged doctrinal controversies as prejudicial to inward peace and ethical striving; for we reach here unfathomably deep mysteries on the solution of which thought must not insist.¹ The meaning and value of life are

¹ Nāgasena, who may be regarded as being quite familiar with the views of his predecessors and contemporaries, says that there are questions which do not deserve to be answered. There are four different kinds of questions: (1) Some can be answered definitely (*ekāṁśayākaraṇīya*). 'Will every one who is born die?' 'Yes,' is the decisive answer. (2) Some questions can be answered by resort to division (*vibhajya vyākaraṇīya*). Is every one reborn after death? Any one free from passions is

determined by the mystery behind it, by an infinity which cannot be rationalized. The pain and evil of life would be unendurable if the empirical universe were all, if world and man were self-sufficient, if there were nothing beyond, higher, deeper, more mysterious. We believe in a transcendent superhistoric reality, not so much because rational thought demands its existence, but because the empirical is bounded by a mystery in which rational thought ends. Systems of affirmative theology which give us glowing pictures of the divine and his relation to us are exoteric and do not touch upon the ultimate issues of life. Mystical negative theology brings us closer to the final depths. The limit to rational thought and logical definition is set by a mystery. 'Before it words turn back and mind fails to find it.'¹ In the extreme abstinence of his words the Buddha shows himself to be the absolute mystic, and yet his followers in later generations interpreted his silence² in divergent ways. Man's instinct for philosophizing cannot be suppressed for long. Eighteen different sects grew up in the second century after the Buddha, if

not re-born, while one who is not so is reborn. (3) Some questions can be answered by counter questions (*pratiprcchāvākaraṇīya*). Is man superior or inferior? The counter question is: 'In relation to what?' If, in relation to animals, he is superior; if in relation to gods, he is inferior. (4) There are some questions which require to be set aside (*sthāpanīya*). Are the aggregates (*skandhas*) the same as the soul (*sattva*)? (*Milindapañha*, iv. 2. 4) Cf. *Abhidharmakośa*, v. 22:

'ekāṁśena vibhāgena pr̄cchātāḥ sthāpanīyataḥ
vyākṛtam maraṇotpattivīśiṣṭātmānyatādivat.'

¹ *Taittirīya Up.* ii. 4 ² *Samyutta*, iv. 400; *Majjhima*, i. 426

the reports of the *Chronicles of Ceylon* are to be accepted.¹ In understanding the meaning of the Buddha's silence three alternatives are open to us. (1) He did not know whether there was anything beyond the empirical succession. (2) He knew that the empirical universe was all and there was nothing beyond it. (3) He believed that there was a trans-empirical reality in the universe, a time-transcending element in the self, but had his ethical motives and logical reasons for declining to give definitions of essentially ineffable matters. There are some who make out that his silence was a cloak for nihilism. He denies the reality of any absolute and so there is nothing permanent in the soul, and *nirvāna* is the night of nothingness, annihilation. There are others who look upon him as an agnostic. He did not know the truth of things ; possibly the truth, if any, could not be known. His silence was an expression of suspended judgement. Still others think that he was a mystic, and like all mystics shrank from giving descriptions of ineffable states which could only be felt and realized and not discussed and spoken about. Modern interpreters of the teaching of the Buddha accept one or the other of the views according to their own inclinations.

Anyone who believes that the Buddha was a sceptic or an agnostic who did not know the ultimate grounds of things simply because he did not give an account of them misses the main drift of his teaching.² Such an attitude will be opposed to

¹ *Dīpavaniśa*, v. 53 ; *Mahāvaniśa*, v. 8

² Professor A. Berriedale Keith states the case for the agnostic view thus : 'It rests on the twofold ground that the

many utterances in which the Buddha makes out that he knows more than what he has given to his disciples. It will be unfair to equate his attitude with an indolent scepticism which will not take the trouble to find out a positive or a negative answer to the ultimate questions, or to say that he had not the courage to own that he did not know. We read : 'At one time, the Exalted One was staying at Kosambi in the Sinsapā grove. And the Exalted One took a few Sinsapā leaves in his hand and said to his disciples : "What think ye, my disciples, which are the more, these few Sinsapā leaves which I have gathered in my hand, or the other leaves yonder in the Sinsapā grove ?" "The few leaves, sire, which the Exalted One holds in his hand are not many, but many more are those leaves yonder in the Sinsapā grove." "So also, my disciples, is that much more, which I have learned and have not told you, than that which I have told you. And, wherefore, my disciples, have I not told you that ? Because, my disciples, it brings you no profit,

Buddha has not himself a clear conclusion on the truth of these issues but is convinced that disputation on them will not lead to the frame of mind which is essential for the attainment of *nirvāna*.' 'Western analogies show sufficiently that there are many earnest thinkers who believe in the reality and purpose of the universe—which the Buddha did not—and yet accept the destruction of the individual on death with satisfaction or resignation.' 'It is quite legitimate to hold that the Buddha was a genuine agnostic, that he had studied the various systems of ideas prevalent in his day without deriving any greater satisfaction from them than any of us today do from the study of modern systems, and that he had no reasoned or other conviction on the matter.' (*Buddhist Philosophy* (1923), pp. 45 and 63)

it does not conduce to progress in holiness ; because it does not lead to the turning from the earthly, to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory, to peace, to knowledge, to illumination, to *nirvāna* : therefore have I not declared it unto you.”¹ Mālunkyaputta² states the metaphysical issues and says frankly that he is dissatisfied because the Buddha will not answer them. He challenges him with a bluntness bordering on courtesy : ‘ If the Lord answers them, I will lead a religious life under him : if he does not answer them I will give up religion and return to the world. If the Lord does not know, then the straightforward thing is to say, “ I do not know.” ’ With a quiet courtesy the Buddha says that he did not offer to answer the questions and gives a parable. ‘ A man is hit by a poisoned arrow. His friends hasten to the doctor. The latter is about to draw the arrow out of the wound. The wounded man, however, cries : “ Stop, I will not have the arrow drawn out until I know who shot it, whether a woman or a Brāhmin, a Vaiśya or a Sūdra, to which family he belonged, whether he was tall or short, of what species and description the arrow was,” and so on. What would happen ? The man would die before all these questions were answered. In the same way the disciple who wished for answers to all his questions about the beyond and so on would die before he knew the truth about suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way to the cessation of suffering.’ The Buddha’s aim is intensely practical, to incite

¹ *Samyutta*, v. 437

² *Majjhima*, 63

his listeners not to speculation but to self-control. There are parts of what most concerns us to know which he cannot describe adequately. So he desires his disciples to follow his path and see for themselves. He proclaims that if we exert and control our thoughts, purify our hearts and remould our desires, there will shine out on us the gold-like splendour or virtue; the perfect goodness; the eternal *dharma* will be established in the stainless shrine. The vision is for him who will see it, for as the Buddha says in his sermon at Benares: 'If ye walk according to my teaching . . . ye shall even in this present life apprehend the truth itself and see face to face.' It is not an agnostic who speaks here with such conviction and authority.

Though he questioned many beliefs, he never doubted the existence of the moral order of the universe or the supreme reality and value of the life of the soul. His incessant insistence on the practice of virtue and the critical testing of opinions by the standard of reason were based on ardent positive convictions. The absolute is for him the law of righteousness. It is the answer to human hope and striving, that on which the whole existence of the world is founded. It is the meaning of history, the redemption of all creation.

If we assume, as we are obliged to by the compulsion of facts, that the Buddha knew the truth, though he did not proclaim it, may it not be that his truth was atheism? Those who wish to discredit the powerful and massive witness of religious experience to the reality of an absolute spirit quote the Buddha in their support. Was not *nirvāna* 'only

the sleep eternal in an eternal night'? A heaven without a God, immortality without a soul, and purification without prayer sum up his doctrine. T. H. Huxley finds hope in the fact that 'a system which knows no God in the Western sense, which denies a soul to man, which counts the belief in immortality a blunder and the hope of it a sin, which refuses any efficacy to prayer and sacrifice, which bids men to look to nothing but their own efforts for salvation, which in its original purity knew nothing of vows of obedience and never sought the aid of the secular arm; yet spread over a considerable moiety of the old world with marvellous rapidity and is still, with whatever base admixture of foreign superstitions, the dominant creed of a large fraction of mankind'.¹ Given the psychological conditions of the time, the reception of the Buddha's message would be unthinkable, if it were negative. For any one who is familiar with the religious environment of India it is impossible to look upon a philosophy of negation as the mandate of a religious revival. Though the Buddha disputes the pre-eminence of Brahmā, the highest of the gods, those who accepted his leadership felt that he did so in the interests of a higher concept. The worshippers of other gods transferred their adoration to another form of divinity. It was the age of the growth of the great gods Śiva and

¹ Romanes Lecture, 1893. Childers in his article on 'Nibbāna' in the *Pāli Dictionary* writes: 'There is probably no doctrine more distinctive of Śākyamuni's original teaching than that of the annihilation of being.' (pp. 267 and 274) Burnouf 'is decidedly in favour of the opinion that the goal of Buddhism is annihilation.'

Viṣṇu, and in course of time the Buddha himself was deified by his followers. His adherents were certainly not people inclined to atheism.

It would be more interesting and legitimate if we should relate the Buddha's teaching to his own environment and ask whether or not he believed in a reality beyond and behind the phenomenal world, in a self over and above the empirical individual and in a positive conception of *nirvāṇa* as life eternal. It would help us to decide the question whether he is an atheist or a believer in an absolute spiritual reality.

1. The conception of *dharma* has an interesting history. The idea of *rta* as moral and physical order is an Indo-Iranian one.¹ All things and beings are under the power of law. They follow a certain course prescribed for them. In the Vedic period the idea gradually extended from the physical order to the moral order of the world and covered law, custom and etiquette, the principles by which a man should act. *Rta*, the moral order, is not the creation of a god. It is itself divine and independent of the gods, though the gods Varuṇa and the Ādityas are its guardians. In the *Upaniṣads* we find statements like: 'There is nothing higher than *dharma*.' 'That which is the *dharma* is the truth.'² *Rta* (order) and *satya* (truth) are the practical and theoretical sides of one reality.³ The real is the world of perfect rhythm. Disjointedness, separateness, incoherence, lack of rhythm are marks

¹ In both Vedic and old Persian it is expressed by the same word meaning law, Vedic *rta*, old Persian *arta*, Avestan *asha*.

² *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* i. 4. 14 ³ *Taittiriya Up.* i. 1 and 9

of our mortal life. Our love of order, our search for truth, is an acknowledgement of our kinship with the other world. Whereas in the *Upaniṣads* stress is laid on the absolute as real, and truth and *dharma* are identified with it, in early Buddhism there is greater stress laid on *dharma* as the norm operating in the actual world and a lack of concentration on the absolute as real. *Dharma* is the immanent order. It denotes the laws of nature, the chain of causation, the rule for the castes. 'Who is, venerable sir, the King of Kings?' 'Dharma is the King of Kings.'¹ It is the absolute infallible righteousness of which our earthly justice is but a shadow. Gradually it was applied to the form or character of a thing, its ground and cause.

The Absolute is apprehended by us in numberless ways. Each religion selects some one aspect of it and makes it the centre to which others are referred. The Buddha emphasized the ethical aspect. For him the whole process of nature, from wheeling stars to the least motion of life, is wrought by law. Even though we may, in some of our speculative moods, contemplate the possibility that the universe is irrational and chaotic, we do not in practice adopt that view. We assume and work in the hope that the world is an expression of law, and our hope is increasingly justified by experience. But this law is an ethical one. We may in some of our perverse moods imagine that the universe is chaotic, loveless and wicked, but we act in the supreme confidence that it is essentially righteous. The moral ideals

¹ *Anguttara*, iii

are not subjective fancies or casual products thrown up by the evolutionary process. They are rooted in the universe. For the Buddha, *dharma* or righteousness is the driving principle of the universe. It is what we are expected to bring into existence. Every moral ideal has two features. It is attainable by man and sustainable by the universe. If it is not in our power to bring it into existence, there is no point in asking us to work for it. Unattainable values may be beautiful to contemplate, but they are by no means ethical. They do not hold our loyalty. It may be argued that we may strive to realize the values, but the universe will dash our hopes and our best endeavours will be frustrated. We cannot hope to make things better than they are. We require the assurance that there is a pervasive principle which works towards moral perfection, the ideal to which we finite individuals contribute, each within his own limited sphere. The Buddha gives us that assurance. He tells us that the only reality on which we can count is *dharma* or righteousness. The redemption of the world is the actualization of *dharma*. 'All beings in the world,' he says, 'yea, all shall lay aside their complex form.'¹ The Buddha may not believe in a cosmic potentate, omniscient and omnipotent, but he tells us that the universe is not indifferent to our ethical striving. The central reality of *dharma* backs

¹ 'One deep divergence must be named. The Buddhist scheme proclaims the ultimate salvation of all beings. Christianity in its most wide-spread historic forms still condemns an uncounted number to endless torment and unceasing sin.' (J. E. Carpenter : *Buddhism and Christianity* (1923), p. 306)

us in our endeavours to achieve a better than what is. There is a reality beyond the empirical succession that responds to the confidence of those that trust it. *Dharma* is not a mere abstraction but is the reality underlying the sensible world determining it. Though everything in this empirical universe is passing, there is something which does not pass. It expresses itself in the world as natural and spiritual law, which is the transcendental character of the empirical universe. We are to pay homage and reverence to it. The Buddha after he is fully enlightened proposes to live under *dharma* 'paying it honour and respect'.¹ Insight into *dharma* (*dhammavipassana*) is enlightenment. The end of the eight-fold path is the winning of insight, 'the attainment, comprehending and realizing even in this life emancipation of heart and emancipation of insight'. Is this insight a subjective psychical condition, a state of love without an object of love, as the Buddha puts it? He tells us that in it we attain a direct and immediate realization of the supremely real, here and now.² We seize directly the spiritual hidden below the sensible appearances. From the order in the confusion we get to the eternal in the transient, the reality in the phenomena. This insight is attained by keeping the mind in a state of repose and detachment from the outward reality. When we purify our heart by

¹ *Samyutta*, ii. 138 f.; *Anguttara*, ii. 20 f.

² In one of the early Pali texts, *nirvāṇa* is described as 'subtle, comprehensible by the wise, indescribable and realizable only within one's self': 'nipuno pañditavedaniyo, atakkavilecāro, paccattam veditabbo viññūhi.'

ethical training, when we focus the total energy of our consciousness on the deepest in us, we awaken the inherent divine possibilities, and suddenly a new experience occurs with clarity of insight and freedom of joy. Those who tell us that for the Buddha there is religious experience, but there is no religious object, are violating the texts and needlessly convicting him of self-contradiction. He implies the reality of what the *Upanisads* call Brahman, though he takes the liberty of giving it another name, *dharma*, to indicate its essentially ethical value for us on the empirical plane. The way of the *dharma* is the way of the Brahman.¹ To dwell in *dharma* is to dwell in Brahman.² The *Tathāgata* is said to have the *dharma* as his body, the Brahman as his body, to be one with the *dharma* and one with the Brahman.³ The eight-fold path is called indifferently *brahmayāna* or *dharmayāna*.

2. The doctrine of non-self (*anatta*) asserts that the ego is a process of becoming. In the *Alaguddūpama Sutta*⁴ the accusation is made that the Buddha teaches the doctrine of the destruction of a real entity, but he denies it absolutely. He argues that he bids men throw off only the non-ego consisting of the five constituents, bodily form, perception, feeling, the dispositions and intellect. He found a party of thirty weak young men who had been spending their time with their wives in a grove. One of them had no wife and for him they had taken a courtesan, who, while they were not noticing, had taken their things and fled. Seeking

¹ *Saṃyutta*, i. 141

² *Anguttara*, i. 207

³ *Dīgha*, iii. 84, 81

⁴ *Majjhima*, i. 140

for her, they inquired of the Buddha whether he had seen a woman. 'What do you think, young men,' he replied, 'which is better for you, to go in search of a woman or to go in search of your self?' 'It is better, Lord, for us to go in search of our self.'¹ The *Dhammapada* says: 'The self is the lord of self; who else should be the lord? With self well subdued, a man finds a lord such as few can find.'² In a remarkable passage³ he says: 'My disciples, get rid of what is not yours. Form, feeling, perception, etc. are not yours. Get rid of them. If a man were to take away or burn or use for his needs all the grass and boughs and branches and leaves in this Jeta wood, would it occur to you to say, the man is taking *us* away, burning *us* or using *us* for his needs?' 'Certainly not, Lord.' 'And why not?' 'Because, Lord, it is not our self or anything belonging to our self.' Just in the same way, replies the Buddha, get rid of the constituents (*skandhas*), the not-self. From this it is clear that the constituents have no more to do with the real being of man than the trees of the forest where he happens to be. 'Leave nothing of myself in me,' says Plotinus. There is in man something real and permanent, simple and self-existent, which is contrasted with the transitory constituents, and when the Buddha asks whether anything which is changeable and perishable can be called the self he implies

¹ *Vinaya*, i. 23

² 'attāhi attano nātho kohi nātho paro siyā
attanāhi sudantena nātham labhati dullabham.' (160)

³ *Majjhima*, 22

that there is somewhere such a self.¹ This view is corroborated by the Buddhist formula : 'This in not mine : I am not this : this is not myself.' These negations aim at expressing the absolute difference of self from non-self or object. It is something which stands wholly outside of empirical determinations. When the Buddha asks us to have the self as our light (*attadīpa*), the self as our refuge (*attasaraṇa*),² surely he is referring not to the transitory constituents but the universal spirit in us. Is there nothing else in the self than the empirical collection? Is the person identical with the five aggregates? To this question, the usual answer is given that the relationship is ineffable (*avācya*).³ We cannot say whether the person is identical with the aggregates or distinct from them. Sāriputta, in his discussions

¹ Cf. also the sermon on the burden and the bearer. (*Samyutta*, iii. 25)

² *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, ii. 26. In *Samyuttanikāya*, 1.75 (*Udāna* 47), the *attakāmo* is approved as one who finds in the world, 'naught dearer than the self': 'na . . . piyataram attanā kvaci.'

³ The Buddha felt that his answer, whether affirmative or negative, was likely to be misunderstood. The affirmative answer would lead to the doctrine of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) and the negative answer to nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). The Buddha avoids both these extreme positions. Cf. *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*: 'śāśvatochedanirmuktam tattvam saugatasammataṁ.' (p. 62) Nāgārjuna observes that the Buddhas have taught that there is the self, that there is the not-self as also that there is neither the self nor the not-self:

'ātmety api prajñapitam anātmety api deśitam
buddhair nātmā na cānātmā kaścid ity api deśitam.'
(*Mūlamādhyamikakārikā*, xviii. 6)

with Sati,¹ observes that the Tathāgata is declared neither to be the five aggregates nor to be different from them. In several passages the true self is identified with the eternal *dharma*.²

When the Upaniṣads make out that the centre and core of the human being is the universal self, or *ātman*, and the aim of man is to discover it, the Buddha insists on the remaking of character, the evolving of a new personality. But the discovery of the latent self is not possible without a transformation of the whole being. The aim of man is to become what he is. One has to grow into the self. The Buddha warns us against the danger of assuming that, because we are divine in essence, we are not divided in actuality. To become actually divine is our goal. ‘In this very life he is allayed, become cool, he abides in the experience of bliss with a self that has become Brahma (*brahmabhūta*).’³ The removal of the veils and fetters essential for the manifestation of the universal self is a strenuous ethical process. If the Upaniṣads declare that man is set free by knowledge, the Buddha asserts that he is happy who has renounced all craving. He whose life is smothered with sensuality, dark with fear and hate, lurid with anger and meanness cannot attain that vision or reach that happiness. The Buddha’s emphasis is more on the pathway (*mārga*) than on the goal, but he implies the reality of a universal spirit which is not to be confused with the changing empirical aggregate.

3. The conception of *nirvāṇa* as the blissful

¹ *Majjhima*, i. 256 f.

² *Anguttara*, i. 149

³ *Majjhima*, i. 344; ii. 159; *Anguttara*, ii. 211

end for which every one must strive is taken over by the Buddha from existing speculation, and it is parallel to that of *mokṣa* (release) of the *Upaniṣads*. The term *nirvāṇa* occurs in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, and it means the blowing out of all passions, reunion with supreme spirit (*brahmanirvāṇa*). It does not mean complete extinction or annihilation, but the extinction of the fire of the passions and the bliss of union with the whole.¹ In it the chain of causation is broken for ever and there is no re-birth. The Buddha uses the words *brahma-prāpti*, *brahmabhūta* for the highest state. It is attainable in this life, even before the death of the body. The Buddha describes how he arrived at the incomparable serenity of *nirvāṇa*, in which there is no birth or age, sickness or death, pain or disflement. When the layman *Visākha* asked the nun *Dhammadinnā* what *nirvāṇa* was, she said: 'You push your questions too far, *Visākha*. The religious life is plunged in *nirvāṇa*, its aim is *nirvāṇa*, its end is *nirvāṇa*. If you wish, go and ask the Lord, and as he explains it, thus bear it in mind.' The Buddha said to the layman: 'The nun *Dhammadinnā* is learned. She is of great wisdom. If you had asked me the question, I should have explained it as she did, that indeed is the answer. Thus bear it in mind.'² We can make end of pain in this life.³ The Buddha is not content with making promises to be

¹ In *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, selfless devotion to God is said to help us to attain *nirvāṇa*: 'prāpnoty ārādhite viṣṇoh nirvāṇam apicotammam.'

² *Majjhima*, i. 304

³ 'ditthe dhamme dukkhas' antakaro hoti.' (*Majjhima*, 9)

fulfilled beyond the grave, but speaks to us of a vision to be achieved while we are yet in the body. Those who have gone up into the holy mount come back with their faces shining. Mogallāna said to Sāriputta: 'Your faculties, friend, are clear, the colour of your skin is pure and clean, can it be that you have attained the immortal?' 'Yes, friend, I have attained the immortal.' *Nirvāna* is a spiritual state attainable in this life and compatible with intellectual and social work. The sense of self-hood is completely killed in it. Two of the Buddha's disciples declare: 'Lord, he who has reached enlightenment has utterly destroyed the fetters of becoming. Who is, by perfect wisdom, emancipate, to him there does not occur the thought that anyone is better than I or equal to me or less than I.' 'Even so,' answered the Buddha, 'do men of the true stamp declare the wisdom they have attained. They tell what they have gained but do not speak of "I" (*attā*).'¹

It is non-temporal in the sense that birth and death are indifferent to those who attain it. It brings with it happiness of the highest order. It inspires the poetry of much of Thera and Therīgāthas. What happens at the death of the body? Is it an absolute cessation of the enlightened one or is it only a severance of connexion with the world of experience and the enjoyment of another sphere of existence, which is the true reality? The Buddha declines to answer the question. It is difficult to get canonical support for the view that *nirvāna* is

¹ *Anguttara*, iii. 359

annihilation. When the Buddhist scriptures speak to us in eloquent terms and give us ecstatic descriptions of the state of holiness, perfection reached by the ethical path, it is not of death that they speak. *Nirvāna*, the fruit of the noble path, the freedom from passions, the rest that knows no break, the life that even the gods are said to covet, the goal of all striving, is not nothingness. It is the breaking down of the barriers that constitute separate existence. It is the unchanging life in the timeless all. It is not the mere correction of previous existence, but the end of all present and previous forms, something contrasted with the here and now. When the words 'deathless, endless, changeless' are applied to it, they refer to the quality of being and not to the duration of existence. 'No measure can measure him who has attained life eternal. There is no word to speak of him. Since all forms of existence are done away, all paths of speech are done away likewise.'

In the *Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta*¹ it is said that the flame ceases to appear when the fuel is consumed. Similarly, when the cravings and desires which sustain the fire of life disappear, its fuel is consumed. The extinction of the visible fire is not utter annihilation.² What is extinguished is the fire of lust, of hatred and of bewilderment. Nun Khemā tells King Pasenadi that 'the Lord has not explained it.' 'Why has the Lord not explained?' 'Let me ask you a question, O King,' and as it suits

¹ *Majjhima*, i. 487

² In the *Śvetāśvatara Up.* the supreme self is compared to a fire the fuel of which has been consumed.

you, so explain it. What think you, O King ? Have you an accountant or reckoner or estimator who can count the sands of the Ganges, and say, so many grains, or so many hundred, thousand, or hundred thousand grains ?' 'No, reverend one.' 'Have you an accountant who can measure the water of the ocean and say, so many measures of water, or so many hundred, thousand, or hundred thousand measures ?' 'No, reverend one.' 'And why ?' 'Reverend one, the ocean is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable.' 'Even so, O King, that body by which one might define a Tathāgata is relinquished, cut off at the root, uprooted like a palm tree brought to nought, not to arise in the future. Freed from the designation of body, a Tathāgata is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable as the ocean.'¹

The liberated soul apart from the mortal constituents is something real but ineffable. When Yamaka maintains that a monk in whom evil is destroyed is annihilated when he dies and does not exist, Sāriputta argues that it is a heresy and that even in this life the nature of a saint is beyond all understanding. To Vaccha, the Buddha says that 'the saint who is released from what is called form is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean'. It is a different, deeper mode of life, inconceivable (*anānuvejjo*).² It is capable only of negative description. The expressions of negative theology, the divine dark, the infinite God, the shoreless ocean, the vast desert, occur again and again. It is not being in the ordinary sense and yet

¹ *Samyutta*, iv. 374

² *Alaguddūpama Sutta*

a positive reality of which thought has no idea, for which language has no expression. If this world is an endless process, perpetual change, *nirvāna* is peace and rest in the bosom of the eternal. The consciousness contemplated in *nirvāna* is so different from the ordinary human consciousness that it should not bear the same name. Rather it is non-consciousness, for all distinct consciousness is the consciousness of a not-self, of externality. As the *Upaniṣad* has it: 'When he does not know, yet is he knowing, though he does not know.'¹ For knowing is inseparable from the knower because it cannot perish. But there is no second, nothing else different from him that he could know. 'It becomes (transparent) like water, one, the witness, without a second. This is the world of Brahman.'² All is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant. There is no admixture of the unstable. In the famous passage of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* Yājñavalkya describes to his wife Maitreyī the nature of the released soul as one with the highest reality and being not definable in terms of anything else. 'As a lump of salt has no inside nor outside and is nothing but taste, so has this Ātman neither inside nor outside and is nothing but knowledge. Having risen from out these elements (the human soul) vanishes with them. When it has departed (after death) there is no more consciousness.' She expresses her bewilderment. Then Yājñavalkya continues: 'I say nothing bewildering; verily, beloved, that Ātman is imperish-

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* iv. 3. 30

² 'salila eko draṣṭāvaito bhavati eṣa brahmalokah.' (Ibid. iv. 3. 32)

able and indestructible. When there is, as it were, duality, then one sees the other, one tastes the other, one salutes the other, one hears the other, one touches the other, one knows the other. But when the Ātman only is all this, how should we see, taste, hear, touch, or know another ? How can we know him, by whose power we know all this ? That Ātman is to be described by no, no (*neti neti*). He is incomprehensible for he cannot be comprehended, indestructible for he cannot be destroyed, unattached for he does not attach himself: he knows no bond, no suffering, no decay. How, O beloved, can one know the knower?¹ He is the light of lights. In a beautiful passage,² it is said : 'To the wise who perceive him (Brahman) within their own self belongs eternal peace, not to others. They feel that highest unspeakable bliss, saying this is that. How then can I understand it ? Has it its own light or does it reflect light ? No sun shines there, nor moon, nor stars, nor these lightnings, much less this fire. When he shines, everything shines after him: by his light all the world is lighted.' The *Udāna* states the Buddha's position correctly when it affirms the reality of something beyond greed, ignorance and duality, free from all attachments, a further shore, steadfast, imperishable, which no storms could shake. *Nirvāna* belongs to that order. ' For there is a sphere ', said the Buddha, ' where there is neither earth nor water, light nor air, neither infinity of space nor infinity of consciousness, nor nothingness nor perception nor absence of

¹ iv. 5. 5

² *Katha Up.* ii. 5. 13-15

perception, neither this world nor that world, both sun and moon. I call it neither coming nor going nor standing, neither motion nor rest, neither death nor birth. It is without stability, without procession, without a footing. That is the end of sorrow.¹ Space cannot hold it, for it is without position: time cannot contain it, for it is above all change. It neither acts nor suffers. Rest and motion are identical to it.²

V

It is unwise to insist on seeing nihilism or agnosticism in teachings where another explanation is not merely possible but probably more in accordance with the Buddha's ideas and the spirit of the times. It is impossible for any one to have the Buddha's fundamental experience of the deficiency of all things mutable and therefore of human life, in so far as it is occupied with passing things, without a positive experience of an absolute and immutable good. It is the background against which the emptiness of the contingent and the mutable is apprehended. If the Buddha declined to define the nature of this Absolute or if he contented himself with negative definitions, it is only to indicate that absolute being is above all determinations.³ It is difficult to differentiate this supreme

¹ *Udāna*, E. T. by G. Strong, p. 111

² For a fuller discussion of this question see *Indian Philosophy*, vol. i, 2nd ed. (1929), pp. 676 ff., 446 ff., 465 ff.

³ The tradition of teaching by silence has been an ancient one in India. *Kena Up.* says: 'The eye does not go thither, nor speech nor mind. We do not know, we do not understand

being from the absolute Brahman of Advaita Vedānta or the super-God of Christian mysticism as formulated in the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius. The Buddha's condemnation of the world of experience is based on the same assumption of the absolute, but he refused to state it as the ground of the depreciation since it is not a matter capable of

how one can teach it. It is different from the known, it is also above the unknown, thus we have heard from those of old who taught us this.' (i. 2, 4) *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* points out that the self can only be described as 'not this, not this. It is incomprehensible; so cannot be comprehended.': 'sa eṣa neti nety ātmā agrhyo na hi grhyate.' (iii. 9. 26; iv. 2, 4; iv. 4. 22) *Taittirīya Up.* observes that the words turn back from it with the mind. In his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*, Saṃkara recounts that the teacher, when requested to explain the nature of the self, kept silent and to the repeated inquiries of the pupil, gave the answer: 'Verily, I tell you but you understand not, the self is silence.': 'brūmah khalu tvam tu na vijānāsi upaśānto' yam ātmā.' (iii. 2. 17)

In the *Dakṣināmūrti Stotra*, it is said: 'Wonderful is it that there under a banyan tree the pupil is old while the preceptor is young. The teaching of the preceptor is by silence, but the doubts of the pupil are dispersed':

' citram vaṭataror mūle vṛddhaḥ śiṣyo gurur yuvā
gurostu maunam vyākhyānam śiṣyastu chinnasamśayah.'

The silence of the Buddha is thus in conformity with the ancient tradition of *mauna*. *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* says that the transcendental truth has no words for its expression: 'paramārthaḥ tvaṇakṣarāḥ': 'silent are the Tathāgatas, O Blessed one': 'maunā hi bhagavans tathāgatāḥ.' The *Mādhyamika* system looks upon the Absolute as free from the predicates of existence, non-existence, both and neither: 'asti nāsti, ubhaya anubhaya catuskotivinirmuktam.' So Nāgārjuna says that the Buddha did not teach anything to anybody: 'na kvacit kvasyacit kaścid dharmo buddhena deśitah.' (*Mādhyamikakārikā*, xv. 24)

logical proof. Hesitation and diffidence in defining the nature of the supreme seemed proper and natural to the Indian mind. The *Upaniṣads* rarely try to cramp the divine within the limits of logical descriptions or stringent definitions. The Buddha's complete renunciation of any attempt at determination is at the opposite extreme to the utmost precision of detail in which some other teachers indulge. It is a case of an excess of light which ignores the value of shade. The Buddha's reasons for his silence are quite intelligible. In the first place, in the India of the sixth century B.C. we had speculations as bold, and speech as pungent, and varieties of religious experience as numerous and as extravagant, as anywhere and at any time in the history of mankind. The people were not only full of superstition, but were also intensely sophisticated, and it was difficult to draw a sharp line between the superstition of the ignorant and the sophistry of the learned.¹ In this confusion the Buddha insisted on an understanding of the facts of human nature and experience and an avoidance of all speculation and belief on mere authority. Authority rules through the appeal it makes to

Candrakīrti declares that, for the noble, the highest truth is silence: 'paramārtho hi āryāṇām tūṣṇīm bhāvah. (*Mādhyamikavṛtti*, p. 56) Again: 'How can the truth which is inexpressible be taught and heard? Yet it is through attribution that it is taught and heard.'

'anakṣarasya dharmasya śrutih kā deśanā ca kā

śrūyate deśyate cāpi samāropād anakṣarah.' (*Ibid.* p. 264)

Cf. the maxim: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'

¹ See *Brahmajāla Sutta*.

man's reason and insight. The human spirit rightly submits to it only in so far as this character of its truth or worth is actually seen or recognized. Prudence, respect, fear may counsel obedience on occasions, but if these are the only considerations, they have no true authority. The Buddha requires us to possess the courage and the resolution to use our own understanding and pass beyond theories to facts. Secondly, each should realize the truth by personal effort and realization. For this ethical striving was essential. Doctrinal controversies produced hasty tempers and did not lead to a quiet pursuit of truth. Truth is a sacred achievement, not a plaything of the dialectician. In the world of spirit none can see who does not kindle a light of his own.¹ Thirdly, his mission was to interest not merely the intellectuals, but the common people with great ideas. He was anxious to tell them that the royal road was by the practice of the virtues. Fourthly, the affirmative theology, in its anxiety to bring the absolute into relation with the relative, makes the absolute itself relative. It offers proofs for the existence of God and conceives of God as an objective reality similar to that of the natural world. It transfers to the world of spirit the quality of reality which properly belongs to the natural world.

¹ The Buddha invites everyone to see for himself (*Dighanikāya*, ii. p. 217); see also *Visuddhamagga*, p. 216: 'ehi passa imam dhammamiti evam pavattam ehi-passa-vidham arahati.' Cf. Plotinus: 'Out of discussion we call to vision, to those desiring to see we point the path; our teaching is a guiding in the way; the seeing must be the very act of him who has made the choice.' (*Enneads*, vi. 9. 4)

Arguments for and against the existence of God understand the divine in a naturalist sense, as an object among objects, as existent or non-existent, as good or evil. They refuse to see the super-being of God, its unfathomable mystery. The views of God as Creator or Father or Lover or Comrade belong to the theology of the finite, which confuses the reality of God with the finite symbols thereof. The divine exists, not by virtue of any relationship to or comparison with other things, but in its own right, as a reality of a different quality infinitely greater than the thoughts of our mind or the phenomena of nature. So the Buddha set himself against all personal conceptions of God, which, by declaring the existence in God of all perfections present in creation, have a tendency to substitute faith for works. Prayer takes the character of private communications, selfish bargaining with God. It seeks for objects of earthly ambitions and inflames the sense of self. Meditation on the other hand is self-change. It is the reconditioning of the soul, the transforming of its animal inheritance and social heredity. Fifthly, the nature of absolute reality is supra-logical, and it is idle to insist on giving logical accounts of it. Subject to these limitations, the Buddha pointed out the reality of *nirvāna*, of an absolute self and of an absolute reality which he chose to call *dharma*. He had support for his austerity of silence and negative descriptions of the absolute in the Upanisads. 'There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind. We know not, we understand not how one would teach it.'¹

¹ We have in Plato a vision of the Beyond transcending the

I may refer briefly to certain inadequacies in the Buddha's thought, which revealed themselves in its later history and relation to Hinduism. (i) Philosophy is a natural necessity of the human mind and even the Buddha did not succeed in compelling his hearers to adopt an attitude of suspended judgement on the ultimate questions. In the absence of definite guidance from the teacher, different metaphysical systems were fastened on him early in the career of Buddhism. (ii) The Buddha's conception of *dharma* as the absolute reality was not sufficiently concrete for practical purposes. We can pray with wheels as the Tibetans do, but not to wheels. Gradually the Buddha became deified. (iii) While the Brāhmin teachers reserved the life of retirement for those who had passed through the trials of life, the Buddha taught that the preparatory stages of student life and married life were not essential and one could retire from the cares of the world at any age. These three exaggerations can be easily understood, if we realize that the three great enemies with which spiritual life had to contend in the Buddha's time were the theologians, the ritualists, and the worldlings.

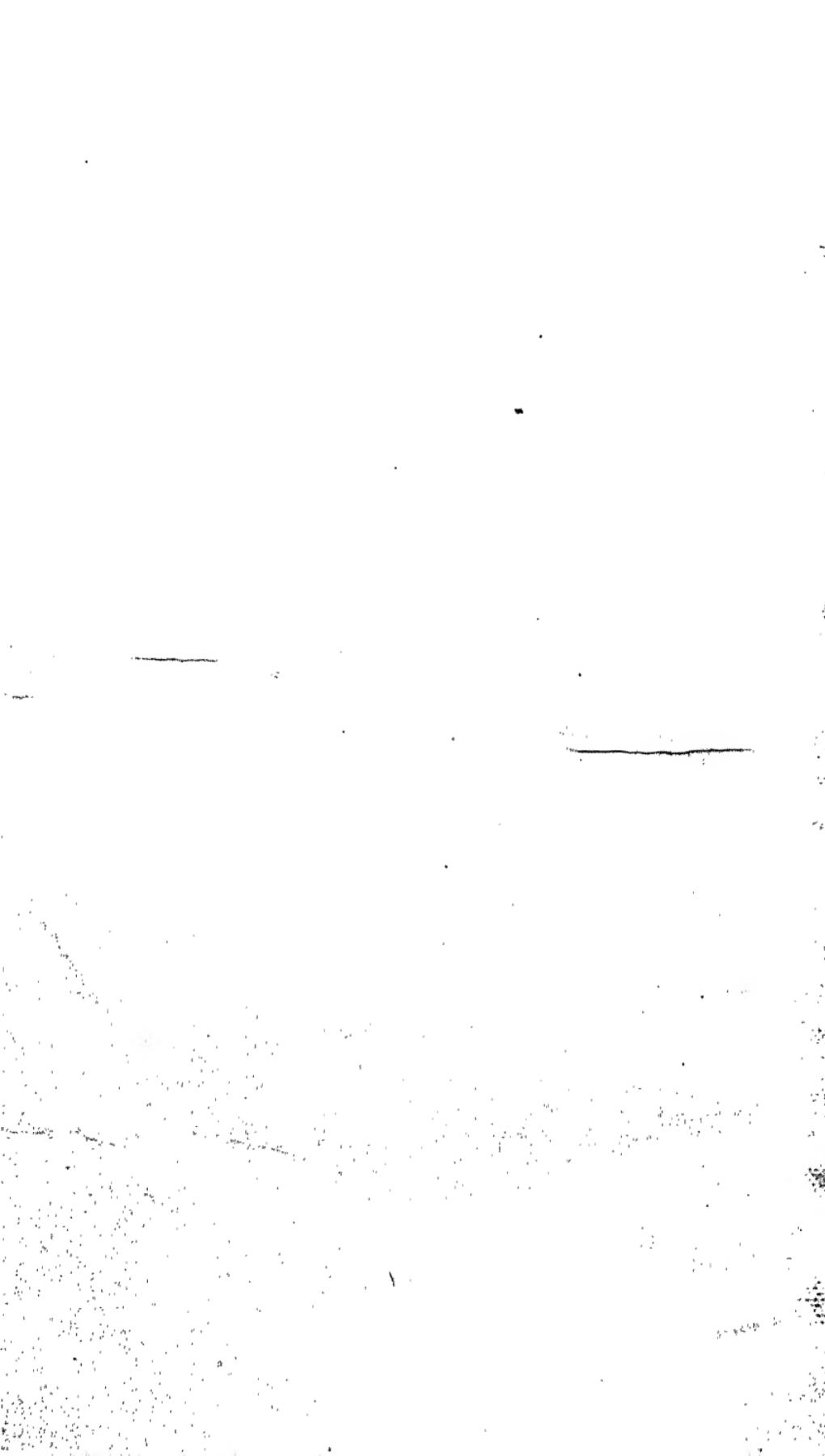
We find in Gautama the Buddha, in powerful

highest God. Dionysius passes beyond the eternal relation of Father and Son, the infinite thinker and his everlasting thought, and fixes his gaze on the abyss of being containing both. This super-essential essence admits of no definition, could be expressed in no predicate. Dionysius dared to call it a Reason that did not reason, a word that could not be uttered, an absolute non-existence that is above all existence.

combination, spiritual profundity and moral strength of the highest order and a discreet intellectual reserve. He is one of those rare spirits who bring to men a realization of their own divinity and make the spiritual life seem adventurous and attractive, so that they may go forth into the world with a new interest and a new joy at heart. While his great intellect and wisdom gave him comprehension of the highest truth, his warm heart led him to devote his life to save from sorrow suffering humanity, thus confirming the great mystic tradition that true immortals occupy themselves with human affairs, even though they possess divine souls. The greatness of his personality, his prophetic zeal and burning love for suffering humanity made a deep impression on those with whom he lived, and gave rise to those legends and stories which are the modes of expression available to ordinary humanity when it tries to express true things, in this case the personal superiority of the Buddha to the rest of them ; and so Gautama the apostle of self-control and wisdom and love becomes the Buddha, the perfectly enlightened, the omniscient one, the saviour of the world. His true greatness stands out clearer and brighter as the ages pass, and even the sceptical minded are turning to him with a more real appreciation, a deeper reverence and a truer worship. He is one of those few heroes of humanity who have made epochs in the history of our race, with a message for other times as well as their own.







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